

## **Chronic Viral Hepatitis and Health Care Principles**

The current efforts to reform the U.S. health care delivery system offers important opportunities for addressing unmet needs and reducing the economic and social costs associated with untreated or undertreated viral hepatitis. It must provide expanded access to high-quality and comprehensive health care, guarantee access to affordable health care, especially for the chronically ill, address ongoing health disparities and require accountability and continue investment in innovation, prevention and wellness care.

### **The scope**

- It is estimated that 5.4 million Americans are chronically infected with either hepatitis B or hepatitis C viruses, conditions that remain a leading cause of liver disease, cirrhosis, liver cancer and failure, liver transplantation and death.
- Chronic viral hepatitis infections kill up to 15,000 Americans each year.
- In 2007 alone, the CDC estimates that 43,000 Americans were newly infected with hepatitis B and 17,000 with hepatitis C.
- More than half of people infected with hepatitis are unaware of their status, underscoring the need to get people tested and treated properly.
- It is estimated that the baby boomer population currently accounts for two out of every three cases of chronic hepatitis C.

### **Policy Implications**

1. Expanding Medicaid for all low-income people, including childless adults, by eliminating current requirements that tie Medicaid to disability status, would give at least half of all people living with viral hepatitis and are currently uninsured immediate access to health care through Medicaid.
2. Including a strong public option would help provide affordable access to comprehensive care for people living with viral hepatitis – at least 30 percent of whom are currently uninsured. This would offer a national standard for coverage and greater dependability, consistency and security for people with hepatitis that private plans, which can charge higher prices and/or close, merge or change benefits at will.

### **Useful Web sites**

National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable: [www.nvhr.org](http://www.nvhr.org)

Caring Ambassadors Hepatitis C Program: [www.hepchallenge.org](http://www.hepchallenge.org)

Hepatitis B Foundation: [www.hepb.org](http://www.hepb.org)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdcnpin.org/scripts/hepatitis/index.asp](http://www.cdcnpin.org/scripts/hepatitis/index.asp)